

SURFSIDE PRIMARY SCHOOL

CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY



1. PURPOSE

- provide an outline of the complaints process at Surfside Primary School so that parents and members of the community are informed of how they can raise complaints or concerns about issues arising at our school
- ensure that all complaints regarding Surfside Primary School are managed in a timely, effective, fair and respectful manner.

2. SCOPE

This policy relates to complaints brought by parents, carers, students or members of our school community and applies to all matters relating to our school. In some limited instances, we may need to refer the complainant to another Department of Education and Training process where there are different mechanisms in place to review certain decisions, for Surfside Primary, expulsion appeals.

3. BACKGROUND

Surfside Primary School's approach to handling concerns and complaints is based on our values of respect, honesty, teamwork and achievement and our commitment to:

- Providing a safe and supportive learning environment
- Building relationships between students, parents and staff
- Providing a safe working environment for staff

4. DEFINITION OF CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

A **'concern'** is an issue of interest (because of its importance and effect) which is raised informally in order to improve or change a situation. For Surfside Primary:

"I believe that the school's physical education policy and program is inadequate. I don't think that it caters for students who have well-developed skills and who need to be involved in competitive sport. I think the school should review its policy in this area".

A **'complaint'** is an expression of grievance or resentment where the complainant is seeking redress or justice. For Surfside Primary:

"My daughter has been left out of the school's netball team for the third time in a row. She is an accomplished netballer and deserves to be part of the team. It is not fair that she is left out and I want you to do something about it!"

A concern or complaint may include the following:

- The management of an incident between students
- The educational or other progress of a student
- The development and implementation of school policies.
- General issues of student behaviour that are contrary to Surfside Primary School's code of conduct
- Incidents of bullying or harassment in the classroom or the school yard (refer to Surfside Primary School's anti bullying policy)
- Learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- Communication with parents
- School fees and payments
- General administrative issues
- Any other school related issues except those listed below

This policy does not cover matters for which there are existing rights of review or appeal, as detailed in the *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*.

Those matters include:

- Student discipline matters involving expulsions
- Complaints about employee conduct or performance and complaints that should be dealt with by performance management, grievance resolution or disciplinary action
- Complaints by the Department of Education and Training's employees related to their employment
- Student critical incident matters
- Other criminal matters

5. IMPLEMENTATION

Surfside Primary School welcomes feedback, both positive and negative, and is committed to continuous improvement. We value open communication with our families and are committed to understanding complaints and addressing them appropriately. We recognise that the complaints process provides an important opportunity for reflection and learning.

We value and encourage open and positive relationships with our school community. We understand that it is in the best interests of students for there to be a trusting relationship between families and our school.

When addressing a complaint, it is expected that all parties will:

- be considerate of each other's views and respect each other's role
 - be focused on resolution of the complaint, with the interests of the student involved at the centre
- act in good faith and cooperation
- behave with respect and courtesy
- respect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved, as appropriate
- operate within and seek reasonable resolutions that comply with any applicable legislation and Department policy.
- recognise that schools and the Department may be subject to legal constraints on their ability to act or disclose information in some circumstances.

Preparation for raising a concern or complaint

Surfside Primary School encourages parents, carers or members of the community who may wish to submit a complaint to:

- carefully consider the issues you would like to discuss
- remember you may not have all the facts relating to the issues that you want to raise
- think about how the matter could be resolved
- be informed by checking the policies and guidelines set by the Department and Surfside Primary School

Complaints process

Surfside Primary School is always happy to discuss with parents/carers and community members any concerns that they may have. Concerns in the first instance should be directed to [insert details how you would prefer concerns to be raised at your school, for Surfside Primary your child's teacher, Year Level Coordinators, Assistant Principal or Principal]. Where

possible, school staff will work with you to ensure that your concerns are appropriately addressed.

Where concerns cannot be resolved in this way, parents or community members may wish to make a formal complaint to the [insert role, i.e. Principal or Assistant Principal, noting that formal complaints should be directed to a member of the school's leadership team].

If you would like to make a formal complaint, in most cases, depending on the nature of the complaint raised, our school will first seek to understand the issues and will then convene a resolution meeting with the aim of resolving the complaint together. The following process will apply:

- A. Complaint received:** Please either email, telephone or arrange a meeting through the front office with the appropriate staff member to outline your complaint so that we can fully understand what the issues are. We can discuss your complaint in a way that is convenient for you, whether in writing, in person or over the phone.

In the first instance, as soon as possible after a concern or complaint occurs, contact should be made to the school. Contact:

- The student's teacher or home group teacher about learning issues and incidents that happened in the class or group.
- The Assistant Principal or Principal if students from several classes are involved.
- The Assistant Principal or Principal about issues relating to staff members or complex student issues.
- The Assistant Principal or Principal about issues relating to school policy, school management, staff members or very complex student issues.
- If unsure who to contact, contact the Principal on 5256 1411.

- B. Information gathering:** Depending on the issues raised in the complaint, the Principal, Assistant Principal or nominee may need to gather further information to properly understand the situation. This process may also involve speaking to others to obtain details about the situation or the concerns raised.

- C. Response:** Where possible, a resolution meeting will be arranged with the Assistant Principal/Principal to discuss the complaint with the objective of reaching a resolution satisfactory to all parties. If after the resolution meeting we are unable to resolve the complaint together, we will work with you to produce a written summary of the complaint in the event you would like to take further action about it. In some circumstances, the Principal may determine that a resolution meeting would not be appropriate. In this situation, a response to the complaint will be provided in writing.

Should the complaint involve complex issues, Surfside Primary School might need to take advice from the Department of Education and Training's Regional Office staff. The school will inform the complainant of the expected timeline for addressing the complaint and the reasons for any delays.

- D. Timelines:** Surfside Primary School will acknowledge receipt of your complaint as soon as possible (usually within two school days) and will seek to resolve complaints in a timely manner. Depending on the complexity of the complaint, Surfside Primary

School may need some time to gather enough information to fully understand the circumstances of your complaint. We will endeavour to complete any necessary information gathering and hold a resolution meeting where appropriate within 10 working days of the complaint being raised. In situations where further time is required, Surfside Primary School will consult with you and discuss any interim solutions to the dispute that can be put in place.

E. Resolution: Where appropriate, Surfside Primary School may seek to resolve a complaint by:

- an apology or expression of regret
- a change of decision
- a change of policy, procedure or practice
- offering the opportunity for student counselling or other support
- other actions consistent with school values that are intended to support the student, parent and school relationship, engagement, and participation in the school community.

In some circumstances, Surfside Primary School may also ask you to attend a meeting with an independent third party, or participate in a mediation with an accredited mediator to assist in the resolution of the dispute.

F. Escalation: If you are not satisfied that your complaint has been resolved by the school, or if your complaint is about the Principal and you do not want to raise it directly with them, then the complaint should be referred to the Barwon South West Regional Office.

Surfside Primary School may also refer a complaint to the Barwon South West Regional Office if we believe that we have done all we can to address the complaint.

Help with raising a concern or complaint

Personal support may be appropriate in situations where the complainant and others involved in the complaint process have emotional issues related to the complaint.

Complainants can seek the services of an advocate when they feel they are unable to express their concern clearly. An advocate can be a friend or someone who is available through an appropriate support organisation who does not receive a fee for service.

All parties involved in addressing a complaint may seek the services of a mediator when there is difficulty coming to an agreement.

The school will ensure that the complainant is aware of these supports. A complainant who wishes to use these support services should ensure the person addressing the concern or complaint is aware of their intention and is in agreement.

6. RESOURCES

5.1 Related school policies

- Student Engagement Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Surfside Primary School Statement of Values

5.2 Department References

Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spaq/pages/spaq.aspx>

Addressing parent's concerns and complaints effectively - Policy and Guidelines

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/spaq/community/policiyparentsconcerns.pdf>

7. MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Concerns and Complaints Policy will be monitored and reviewed by staff and School Council every three years.

This policy was last updated and ratified at School Council on June 15th 2021 and will be reviewed in May 2022.